



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Marketing and
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Programs

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

Wildlife
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DECISION AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

BIRD DAMAGE MANAGEMENT IN NEBRASKA: Reducing Human/Bird Conflicts

I. INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services¹ (WS) program receives and responds to requests for assistance from individuals, organizations and agencies experiencing damage and other problems related to wildlife. Wildlife damage management is the alleviation of damage or other problems caused by or related to the presence of wildlife², and is recognized as an integral part of wildlife management (The Wildlife Society 1992). In October 2008, WS released an Environmental Assessment³ (EA) entitled "*Bird Damage Management in Nebraska: Reducing Human/Bird Conflicts*" to facilitate planning, interagency coordination, streamline program management, and to clearly communicate to the public the analysis of WS' proposed adaptive integrated bird damage management (BDM) program in Nebraska. WS uses an Integrated Wildlife Damage Management (IWDM) approach, commonly known as Integrated Pest Management (WS Directive 2.105⁴) in which a combination of methods may be used or recommended to reduce damage. The imminent threat of damage or loss of resources is often deemed sufficient for wildlife damage management actions to be initiated (U.S. District Court of Utah 1993).

The EA documented the need for adaptive integrated BDM in Nebraska and assessed potential impacts of various alternatives to reduce risks to human health and safety and respond to other damage associated with bird activities. WS also cooperated and consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), United States Air Force (USAF)-Offutt Air force Base, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC), Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA), and University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension (UNLE) to help determine impacts to birds and State wildlife populations and resources, and to ensure that the proposed action is in compliance with relevant laws, regulations, policies, orders and procedures, including: 1) the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) (16 U.S.C. §§ 703-712, as amended), the Migratory Bird Reform Act of 2004, and

¹ WS is a cooperatively-funded, service-oriented program that only responds to requests from public and private entities to protect resources after an Agreement for Control or other comparable document is signed by the property owner/administrator (WS Directives 3.101 and 3.110). WS assists the USFWS, FAA, USAF, NGPC, NDA or UNLE if requested to resolve a human-wildlife conflict if requested and a need is established.

² WS wildlife damage management is not based on punishing offending animals but as one means of reducing damage and is used as part of the WS Decision Model (Slate et al. 1992, USDA 1997, WS Directive 2.201).

³ Ordinarily individual WS damage management actions are categorically excluded and do not require an EA (7 CFR 372.5(c), 60 Fed. Reg. 6000-6003, 1995). However, to facilitate good planning and communication and to disclose the analysis of impacts, an EA was prepared.

⁴ WS Policy Manual provides guidance for WS personnel to conduct wildlife damage management through Program Directives. WS Directives referenced in this Decision document can be found at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ws/wsdirectives.html>.



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the Fish and Wildlife Improvement Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. Sec. 712), 2) Executive Orders (EO) 13186⁵, and 3) MOUs between USFWS, FAA, NGPC and WS. This Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) are based on the analysis in the EA. The EA and supporting documentation⁶ are available for review at the USDA-APHIS-WS State Office, P.O. Box 81866, Lincoln, NE 68501-1866.

The determination for action is the need to reduce risks to public health and safety and damage to agriculture, natural resources, and property from: European Starling⁷ (*Sturnus vulgaris*), Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*), Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*), American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*), Ring-necked Pheasant⁸ (*Phasianus colchicus*) American Coot (*Fulica americana*), Mallard (domestic/wild) (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Gadwall (*A. strepera*), Northern Shoveler (*A. clypeata*), Northern Pintail (*A. acuta*), Green-winged Teal (*A. crecca*), Blue-winged Teal (*A. discors*), Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*), Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*), Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), Sharp-shinned Hawk (*A. striatus*), Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), Swainson's Hawk (*B. swainsoni*), Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*), Great horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*), Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*), Ring-billed Gull (*L. delawarensis*), Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferous*), Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*), Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*), Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*), Western Meadowlark (*S. neglecta*), Rock Dove⁷ (feral pigeon) (*Columba livia*), American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*), House Sparrow⁷ (*Passer domesticus*), Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), Cliff Swallow (*H. pyrrhonota*), Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*), Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*), Wild Turkey⁸ (*Meleagris gallopavo*), Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*), and feral, domestic and exotic birds in Nebraska. Some of the types of bird damage that resource owners/managers seek to alleviate are: 1) hazards to aviation at airports (*i.e.*, aircraft/bird strikes), 2) human health and safety threats (*i.e.*, aircraft/bird strikes, disease risk), 3) property damage, 4) agricultural damage, 5) disease transmission threats to livestock, and 6) threats to threatened or endangered (T/E) species and/or their habitats. Details on the conflicts and benefits associated with birds in Nebraska are provided in the EA. For emergency situations involving the protection of human health and safety (*i.e.*, disease risks, bird/aircraft strikes), WS may take action on a case-by-case basis⁹.

II. AGENCY AUTHORITIES

Under various acts of Congress, EOs, and the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)¹⁰, WS, as requested, is authorized and directed to carry out damage management programs necessary to protect the nation's agricultural and other resources. The USFWS is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the nation's fish and wildlife resources and their habitats. Some of these regulations and acts are:

⁵ Executive Order 13186 directs federal agencies to protect migratory birds and strengthen migratory bird conservation by identifying and implementing strategies that promote conservation and minimize the take of migratory birds through enhanced collaboration between WS and the USFWS, in coordination with state, tribal, and local governments. A National-level MOU between the USFWS and WS is being developed to facilitate the implementation of Executive Order 13186.

⁶ The EA incorporates by reference information in the WS programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (USDA 1997). Copies of the EIS are available from the USDA/APHIS/WS, Operational Support Staff, 4700 River Road, Unit 87, Riverdale, MD 20737-1234.

⁷ It should be noted that Starlings, House sparrows and Pigeons are considered non-indigenous, invasive species, and because of their negative impacts and competition with native birds, are considered by many wildlife biologists and ornithologists to be an undesirable component of North American wild and native ecosystems. These three species are not protected by MBTA or state law. Any population reduction of these species in North America could be considered beneficial to native bird species.

⁸ Ring-necked pheasants and wild turkeys are managed by the state and not protected by MBTA.

⁹ For emergency situations involving the protection of human health and safety (*e.g.*, bird/aircraft strikes), WS may take individuals of additional non-threatened and non-endangered species. This protocol is established via the USFWS Migratory Bird DPs #MB714685-1, #MB834783-0, #MB811063-0, #MB820488-2, #MB 101290-0.

¹⁰ A more complete list of the more pertinent Acts and EOs is listed in the EA.

- Under the Act of March 2, 1931, Public Law No. 100-202, Public Law 106-387, October 28, 2000. Stat. 1549 (Sec 767) and the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2001 the Secretary of Agriculture may carry out damage management programs alone, or may enter into cooperative agreements with States, local jurisdictions, individuals and public and private agencies whereby they may fund and assist in carrying out such programs. The Secretary has delegated this authority to APHIS; within APHIS the authority resides with the WS program.
- The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703-711; 40 Stat. 755), as amended, provides the USFWS regulatory authority to protect species of birds that migrate outside the United States. The law prohibits any "take" of these species by private entities, except as permitted by the USFWS; therefore the USFWS issues permits to private entities for reducing bird damage (50 CFR 21.41).
- EO 13186 directs federal agencies to protect migratory birds and strengthen migratory bird conservation by identifying and implementing strategies that promote conservation and minimize the take of migratory birds through enhanced collaboration between WS and the USFWS, in coordination with state, tribal, and local governments.

The FAA is the federal agency responsible for developing and enforcing air transportation safety regulations, and is authorized to reduce wildlife hazards at commercial and non-commercial airports¹¹ (14CFR, Part 139.337 and Advisory Circular 150/5200-33).

The mission of the USAF is to defend the United States and its global interests -- to fly and fight in air, space, and cyberspace. To achieve that mission, the USAF has a duty of global vigilance, reach and power. Offutt Air Force Base is home to the headquarters of the United States Strategic Command, the Air Force Weather Agency, and the 55th Wing, the Fightin' Fifty-Fifth, and a variety of other important units. Offutt's diverse missions and global responsibilities put it on the cutting edge of the Air Force's transformation.

The authority for the NGPC to manage Nebraska's wildlife is established in the Nebraska Revised Statutes (§37-101, §37-204, §37-209, §37-211, §37-213, §37-215, §37-301, §37-432, §37-432.01, §37-434). Part of the mission of the NGPC is to promote the stewardship of the state's wildlife resources, including migratory birds and state threatened and endangered (T&E) birds, in the best long term interests of the people and those resources. The NGPC is also authorized to cooperate with Nebraska WS and the NDA.

The NDA protects producers and consumers, as well as the health of livestock in Nebraska, by enforcing rules and regulations governing eradication and control of certain livestock and poultry diseases.

UNLE's mission is to help Nebraskans enhance their lives through research-based information. UNLE provide research-based programs and educational materials to help you understand the value of Nebraska's natural resources and the value of good stewardship to ensure sustainability of those resources. Their educational programs encourage locally based partnerships and application of research-based information for addressing issues related to management of eco-systems to sustain diversity of animal and plant species.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENTS

¹¹ The FAA is empowered to issue airport operation certificates to airports serving air carriers, and to establish minimum safety standards for the operation of airports. Some of these regulations and policies directly involve the management of wildlife and wildlife hazards on and/or near airports (FAR 139.337).

Nebraska encompasses 77,358 mi² and its inland lakes, covering more than 481 mi², make up almost 1% of the state's total surface area. Most of Nebraska's largest lakes are concentrated in the western ²/₃ of the state, and they include artificial bodies of water created by dams. The state's highest recorded elevation is Panorama Point, with an elevation of 5,424 feet above sea level. This site is located in the western portion of the state. The mean elevation of the state is 2,600 feet above sea level. In 2003, the annual statewide average temperature was 49.3° F. Across the state, normal regional temperatures vary from 47.5°F in the north central area to 51.4°F in the southeast. In 2003, the total statewide average rainfall was 24.69 inches. Regional precipitation averages varied from a high of 31.03 inches in the southeast to a low of 17.18 inches in the Panhandle (Nebraska Blue Book 2004-2005, <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/web/public/bluebook>).

Airports. Collisions between aircraft and wildlife are a concern throughout the world because they threaten passenger safety (Thorpe 1996), result in lost revenue and costly repairs to aircraft (Linnel et al. 1996, 1999), and can erode public confidence in the airport transportation industry as a whole (Conover et al. 1995). Birds as a group represents the largest segment of wildlife populations that present hazards to aircraft, and therefore are considered a serious threat to human safety when found on or near airports (FAA National Wildlife Strike Database, wildlife.pr.erau.edu/public/index1.html).

State/Federally Owned Properties. State or federal properties in urban and/or rural areas may be affected by birds causing damage to property, landscaping, natural resources, or threaten the health and safety of personnel working or living on the property. When bird problems arise on State or federal properties, WS assistance to reduce damage and human health risks may be requested.

Urban and Suburban Areas. Public and private properties in urban/suburban areas may also be affected when birds cause damage to landscaping, natural resources, and property or affect human health and safety¹².

Agricultural, Aquaculture, Rural, and Forested Areas. Other areas of proposed action include farms, forested areas, aquaculture facilities, hatcheries or nurseries, and rural areas where birds are causing or potentially cause disease transmission and damage to agriculture crops, livestock and feed, property, and natural resources.

IV. ISSUES ANALYZED IN THE EA

The following issues were identified as important to the scope of the analysis (40 CFR 1508.25) and each of the alternatives was evaluated relative to its impacts on these issues.

- Cumulative Effects of WS Bird Damage Management on Target Species Populations
- Effects of WS Bird Damage Management on Non-target Species Populations, Including T/E Species
- Risks Posed by WS Bird Damage Management Methods to the Public and Domestic Animals
- Efficacy of WS Bird Damage Management Methods

An additional ten issues were considered but were not analyzed in detail in the EA:

- WS' Impact on Biodiversity
- Humaneness of WS Bird Damage Management Methods
- Effects of WS Bird Damage Management Methods on Aesthetic Values
- Bird Damage is a Cost of Doing Business – a “Threshold of Loss” Should Be Established Before Allowing any Lethal Bird Damage Management
- Bird Damage Management Should Not Occur at Taxpayers Expense, but Should Be Fee Based

¹² Permits will be issued by USFWS prior to any WS human/bird conflict reduction actions on bird species protected by the MBTA or actions would be compliant with a DO, as appropriate.

- Impacts of West Nile Virus on Bird Populations
- Lethal Bird Damage Management is Futile because 50-65% of Many Species' Populations Die Each Year
- Appropriateness of Preparing an EA (Instead of an EIS) For Such a Large Area
- Cost Effectiveness of Bird Damage Management
- Bird Damage Management Should Be Conducted by Private Nuisance Wildlife Control Agents

V. ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN DETAIL

The following alternatives were developed to analyzed and respond to the issues analyzed in detail. An analysis of the effects of each Alternative on the issues is discussed in the EA. All Nebraska WS management actions comply with appropriate federal, state, and local laws, and Appendix C of the EA provides a description of the methods that could be used or recommended by WS.

Alternative 1 – Continue the Current WS Adaptive Integrated Bird Damage Management Program (No Action/Proposed Action) - The No Action alternative is a procedural NEPA requirement (40 CFR 1502), is a viable and reasonable alternative that could be selected, and serves as a baseline for comparison with the other alternatives. The No Action alternative, as defined here, is consistent with the Council on Environmental Quality's (1981) definition.

The current and proposed program is an adaptive integrated Nebraska WS bird damage management program for the protection of public health and safety, agricultural and natural resources, aquaculture and property. It is anticipated, based on historical information, that the majority of Nebraska WS' bird damage management will be at: 1) airports to reduce potential aircraft/bird strikes to reduce human health and safety risks, 2) livestock facilities to reduce starling feed consumption and fecal contamination and reduce potential risk of disease transmission to livestock, 3) urban and suburban areas to reduce human health and safety risks and protect property, 4) ethanol and power plants to reduce human health and safety risks from disease transmission and to protect property, and 5) aquaculture facilities to protect property and reduce fish consumption.

A major goal of the program is to minimize bird-related losses. To meet this goal, WS would continue to respond to requests for assistance with, at a minimum, technical assistance, or where appropriate when permitted by the USFWS and NGPC and when cooperative funding is available, operational damage management whereby WS personnel conduct bird damage management actions. An IWDM approach would continue to be implemented under this alternative allowing for the use of legally available methods, either singly or in combination, to meet requester needs for reducing bird damage. Agricultural producers, airport managers, property owners and others requesting assistance would be provided information regarding the use of effective non-lethal and lethal techniques, as appropriate. Non-lethal methods include, but are not limited to environmental/habitat/behavior modification, decoy traps and other live traps, exclusionary devices, nest destruction, chemical repellents, and alpha chloralose (AC). Lethal methods considered by WS include: shooting, egg addling/destruction, snap traps, DRC-1339, and American Veterinary Medical Association approved euthanasia techniques, such as CO₂. WS may recommend hunting or DPs to resource owners when these methods are deemed applicable to certain bird damage management situations. Bird damage management would be allowed in the State, when requested, on private or public property where a need has been documented and an *Agreement for Control* or other comparable document has been completed. All management actions would comply with appropriate laws, orders, policies, and regulations.

Alternative 2 – Technical Assistance Only Program - This alternative would not allow for WS operational bird damage management in Nebraska. WS would only provide technical assistance

and make recommendations when requested. Producers, property owners, agency personnel, or others could conduct bird damage management using traps, shooting, Avitrol¹³, or any non-lethal method that is legal. Currently, DRC-1339 and AC are only available for use by WS employees. Therefore, use of these chemicals by private individuals would be illegal.

This "*technical assistance only*" alternative would place the immediate burden of operational damage management on State agencies, individuals and requesters. Individuals experiencing bird damage would, independently or with WS recommendations, carry out and fund damage management activities. Individual producers could implement bird damage management as part of the cost of doing business, or a State or other Federal agency could assume a more active role in providing operational damage management assistance.

If Alternative 2 was selected, operational bird damage management would be left to State (*i.e.*, NGPC) or other Federal agencies (*i.e.*, USFWS) and individuals. Some agencies or individuals may choose not to take action to resolve wildlife damage. Other situations may warrant the use of legally available management methods because of public demands, mandates, or individual preference. Methods and devices could be applied by people with little or no training and experience, and with no professional oversight or monitoring for effectiveness. This in turn could require more effort and cost to achieve the same level of problem resolution, and could cause harm to the environment, including a higher take of non-target animals and illegal use of pesticides could be greater than present. Additionally, any take of migratory birds, outside DOs, without the proper State and Federal permits is a violation of State and Federal law.

Alternative 3 - No WS Bird Damage Management Program - This alternative would terminate the WS program for bird damage management (operational and technical assistance) on all land classes in Nebraska. However, other Federal, State and county agencies, and private individuals could conduct bird damage management but requesters of WS services would not have WS input. WS would not be available to provide technical assistance or make recommendations to livestock producers, airport and landfill managers, property owners or others requesting assistance. In some cases, damage management methods applied by non-WS personnel could be used contrary to their intended or legal use, or more than what is recommended or necessary. Proper State and Federal permits may not be acquired and birds species protected under the MBTA may be illegally taken. In addition, DRC-1339 and AC are only available for use by WS employees. Therefore, use of these chemicals by private individuals would be illegal and Avitrol could be used by any State certified restricted-use pesticide applicator.

A "*no control*" alternative was analyzed by the USFWS (USDI 1979) and was dismissed as an invalid alternative. A "*no control*" alternative was also evaluated in USDA (1997).

VI. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT ANALYZED IN DETAIL IN THE EA ARE THE FOLLOWING

Several alternatives were considered but not analyzed in detail. These are:

- Bounties
- Short Term Eradication and Long Term Population Suppression
- Bird Damage Management Conducted Using Only Non-lethal Methods.

VII. MONITORING

¹³ Avitrol could only be used by state certified pesticide applicators in Nebraska.

The Nebraska WS program will monitor its actions relative to each issue analyzed in detail in the EA. This evaluation will include annual reporting to the USFWS, FAA, USAF, NGPC, NDA and UNLE, as appropriate, the WS take of all species to help ensure no adverse impact on the viability, including T&E species and any incident of public safety. USFWS and NGPC expertise will be used to determine adverse impacts, as appropriate.

VIII. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

As part of this process, and as required by CEQ and APHIS-NEPA implementing regulations, issues related to the proposed action were initially developed and analyzed by WS and the cooperating agencies. As part of WS' environmental analysis process, and as required by CEQ (1981) and APHIS-NEPA implementing regulations, the EA was made available to the public through "Notices of Availability" (NOA) published in the *Lincoln Journal Star* (Fed. Reg. 72:13237- 13238 March 21, 2007), through direct mailings to 43 parties that have specifically requested to be notified and a NOA and the EA was posted on the APHIS website at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/regulations/ws/ws_nepa_public_notice_NE.shtml. Following the 30 day public review and comment period, WS did not receive any comment letters on the EA.

IX. DECISION and RATIONALE

I have carefully reviewed the EA and the input resulting from the EA review process. I believe the issues identified in the EA are best addressed by selecting Alternative 1, continue the current "*Continue the Current WS Adaptive Integrated Bird Damage Management Program (Proposed Action/No Action)*" and applying the associated standard operating procedures and mitigation measures discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA. Alternative 1 provides: 1) the best range of practical and effective damage management methods, 2) has low impacts on target and non-target species, 3) provides safeguards for public safety, 4) allows WS to meet its obligations to the USFWS, FAA, USAF and NGPC and residents of Nebraska, 5) addresses the issues, and 6) allows for WS' congressionally directed role to protect the Nation's agricultural and other resources.

Alternative 1 also provides a mix of technical and operational assistance, and non-lethal and lethal methods. While Alternative 1 does not require non-lethal methods to be used in every situation, WS will continue to consider the use of nonlethal methods and provide information, and encourage the use of practical and effective non-lethal methods, when appropriate (WS Directive 2.101). As a part of this Decision, the Nebraska WS program will provide information to requesters on biological and non-lethal management techniques that could reduce damage. I have also adopted the EA as final because no comments from the public were received to change the analysis.

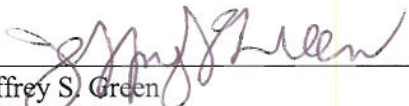
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The EA indicates that there will not be significant impacts, individually or cumulatively, on the quality of the human environment because of the proposed action, and that these actions do not constitute a major federal action. I agree with this conclusion and therefore determine that an EIS will not be necessary or prepared. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. Bird damage management, as conducted in Nebraska is not regional or national in scope.
2. The proposed action will not significantly affect public health and safety.

3. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial. Although there is opposition to government-sponsored damage management, this action in Nebraska is not controversial in relation to size, nature or effects.
4. Standard operating procedures adopted as part of the proposed action lessen risks to the public, prevent adverse effects on the human environment and reduce uncertainty and risks.
5. The proposed action does not establish precedence for future actions with significant effects. This action would not set precedent for additional WS damage management that may be implemented or planned in Nebraska.
6. The number of animals taken annually is very small in comparison to total populations. Adverse effects on wildlife or wildlife habitats are minimal.
7. Bird damage management would not affect park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecological critical areas. The proposed action also does not affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would it cause a loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.
8. An evaluation of the proposed action and its effects on State and federally listed T&E species determined that no significant adverse effects would be created for these species. The proposed action complies fully with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. Consultations with the USFWS and the NGPC regarding potential risks to T&E species have been conducted and these agencies' input was used to develop standard operating procedures for the proposed action.
9. This action would be in compliance with federal, State and local laws or requirements for damage management and environmental protection.
10. No significant cumulative effects were identified by this assessment or other actions implemented or planned within the analysis area.

For additional information regarding this decision, please contact USDA-APHIS-WS State Office, P.O. Box 81866, Lincoln, NE 68501-1866 or by phone @ 402-434-2340.



Jeffrey S. Green
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USDA-APHIS-WS
Fort Collins, Colorado

11/12/08
Date

LITERATURE CITED IN THE DECISION

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